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1962/11/14

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K. The Targeting of San Cristobal

40. Although the sites themselves were closed to ground observation, the movement of equipment to them from the ports was in fact seen by CIA agents and by a number of individuals who later fled to the US. The agents reported this information as soon as they were able, but in most cases had to depend on secret writing for communication. Hence, there was a lag of several days at least before their information became available. Refugee reports were delayed considerably longer for other, and uncontrollable, reasons--the time of the individual's decision to leave Cuba, his discovery of means for doing so, and his delivery to an interrogation center. Many of the reports so received dealt with unidentifiable construction activity. Many of them, because of the time-lags noted above, did not arrive in Washington until after 14 October, and some are still coming in.

41. Nevertheless, by about 1 October, the San Cristobal area had been pinpointed as a suspect MRBM site and photographic confirmation had been requested. This represents a considerable technical achievement. To understand why, it is again necessary to back-track in time. Since the moment of Castro's triumphal march into Havana, the Intelligence Community had been flooded with reports of Soviet weapons shipments and missile installations in Cuba. There were several hundred such reports, claiming the presence of everything from small arms to ICBMs, before August 1960, i.e., before the USSR had supplied Cuba with any weapons at all. More specifically, CIA's files contain 211 intelligence reports (this does not include press items) on missile and missile-associated activity in Cuba before 1 Jan 1962. All of these were either totally false or misinterpretations by the observer of other kinds of activity. CIA analysts had naturally come to view all such reports with a high degree of suspicion.

42. On 15 February 1962 an Interagency Interrogation Center was established by CIA at Opa Locka, near Miami, to handle Cuban refugees and improve the quality of intelligence collected from them. It was manned by trained bilingual interrogators from the armed services and CIA. The establishment of Opa Locka coincided with a sharp drop in reports of missile activity received in Washington. When the defensive phase of the Soviet buildup began, the volume of Opa Locka reporting rose very rapidly, and provided good information on the types of equipment coming in, on the use of Soviet personnel and on the security precautions imposed by the Soviets on this operation. (Such reports were the basis for the Checklist item cited in para 9).

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43. For the better part of two years, CIA had been checking information obtained from refugee, defector, and agent sources with NPIC whenever it was apparent that the information was of a kind that could be verified or negated by aerial reconnaissance. In May 1962, NPIC began publishing a series of formal listings (Photographic Evaluation of Information on Cuba) in which these reports were evaluated in the light of photographic coverage. In the 7 issues of this publication between 31 May and 5 October NPIC examined 138 raw reports referred to it for comment. Of this total, only three cited missile activity which could not be linked directly to the SA-2 and cruise missile deployments. NPIC's evidence negated those three.

44. When the first indications of build-up began to come in in August, these procedures were further tightened. CIA current intelligence was ordered orally by the DD/I's office on about 14 August not to publish any information on the construction of missile bases in Cuba until they had been checked out with NPIC. (This instruction was in the field of intelligence technique rather than of policy; it had no relation to later restrictions; (see para 50). Between 14 August and mid-October this office sent NPIC 13 memoranda asking for a check on 25 separate reports containing information which was thought to raise the possibility of Soviet offensive weapons in Cuba. A great many more such reports were checked with NPIC informally by telephone. In all cases, NPIC either lacked the necessary coverage or made a negative finding.

45. On 20 August, the COMOR Targeting Working Group (chaired and staffed largely by CIA) set up the first comprehensive card file system for Cuban targets. An example of its procedures is the handling of targets in the Sagua La Grande area. Based on refugee reporting, the COMOR Targeting Working Group on 27 August pinpointed four farms in this area as suspect missile sites. Readout of the 29 August coverage showed an SA-2 site near Sagua La Grande which apparently was the basis for the reported activity there, and the target card was changed to show a confirmed SA-2 site. It should be noted that knowledge that this site was in the area could have led analysts to misinterpret any subsequent reports of MREB activity as part of the SAM development, but in fact no such reports were received.

46. By September, the volume of agent and refugee reporting had become very large indeed. During the month 882 reports on internal activities in Cuba were disseminated, exclusive of telegraphic dissemination. (The CIA clandestine collectors report that their output represented only the small publishable fraction of the raw material collected.) A substantial

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proportion of these dealt with the deployment of defensive missiles and related activities. Knowledge on the part of the analysts that such a deployment was in fact going on, plus the normal difficulties encountered by untrained observers in telling an offensive missile from a defensive one, tended to throw a sort of smoke-screen around the Soviet offensive deployment when it finally began. The CIA analytic apparatus, however, recognized and correlated the first authentic reports of MRBM equipment ever to be received in Washington, and took action upon them. It targeted the San Cristobal area, not as another location where alleged missile activity should be negated by photography, but as a suspect SS-4 site.

47. This process took about three weeks, from the date when the first observation was made on the ground in Cuba to the preparation of the target card. The two reports from Opa Locka which triggered it were:

a. An observation in Havana on 12 September of a convoy, carrying long canvas-covered objects which the source identified under interrogation as resembling SS-4s. This report, which was disseminated by CIA on 21 September, contained sufficient accurate detail to alert intelligence analysts.

b. An observation on 17 September of a convoy moving toward the San Cristobal area. This information, received on 27 September, dovetailed in many respects with the earlier report.

48. The arrival of the second report led CIA analysts to a tentative conclusion that the two observers had in fact seen the same convoy, and that there was a possibility of the SS-4 identification being genuine. A day or so earlier, a target card on San Cristobal had been prepared on the basis of a vague report of "Russians building a rocket base." Now this card was removed and, with the two reports cited above and other less specific information on activity in this area which was beginning to trickle in, a new card was prepared between 1 and 3 October which was in effect a priority requirement for photographic coverage. This card was used in the targeting of the 14 October flight (see para 63). It read as follows: "Collateral reports indicate the existence of a restricted area in Pinar del Rio Province which is suspected of including an SSM site under construction, particularly SS-4 Shyster. The area is bounded by a line connecting the following four town: Consolacion del Norte (8332N/2244W); San Diego del Los Banos (8325N/2235W); San Cristobal (8301N/2243W); and Las Pozos (8317N/2250W). Requirement: Search the area delineated for possible surface missile construction, with particular attention to SS-4 Shyster."

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49. Another report, too general to be used in the process described above, is nevertheless of interest as the first good information distributed on the Soviet offensive build-up. On 20 September, CIA disseminated a [REDACTED] report that Castro's personal pilot, Claudio Morinas, had said on 9 September "We have 40-mile range guided missiles, both surface-to-surface and surface-to-air, and we have a radar system which covers, sector by sector, all of the Cuban air space and (beyond) as far as Florida. There are also many mobile ramps for intermediate range rockets."

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The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited UHI 2005

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D	1177	X	(52)	X	X		X		X		X		X	
E	1178	X	Panel B-1 1178	X	X		X		X		X		X	
F	1179	X	(52)	X	X		X		X		X		X	
G	1180	X	(52)	2	3	X	X		X		X		X	

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The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited: An International Collection of Documents, from the Bay of Pigs to the Brink of Nuclear War

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